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PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT BUREAUS AND THEIR RELATION TO MANAGERS OF EMPLOYMENT IN INDUSTRY

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For many years, indeed since 1892, public employment bureaus have sprung into existence to provide a clearing house for the employer and the unemployed—a labor market where the employer could make known his demands and the seekers after work could make known their abilities. As time has gone on, the public employment bureaus have come to serve almost entirely the common labor market, so that the American public today looks upon these bureaus as a clearing house, not for all the laboring classes, but for that portion whose work is entirely of a physical nature. Gradually, however, the standard once set by public employment bureaus is being raised; even as these bureaus are ceasing to be located in basements and are being placed on the ground floors, so are they now compelling the industrial world to realize that they do stand on the ground floor in this modern cycle of industrial unrest and overwhelming unemployment. Of the public employment bureaus in America (not including private employment bureaus), only one has undertaken the tremendous task of raising the entire standard of public employment bureaus so as to meet the need of the managers of employment in industry. I refer to the Cleveland office which not only is a center for the laborer and the employer demanding skilled and unskilled labor, but is also a magnet that draws to it the college graduate, the specialized men and women who never before dreamed of using a public employment office. A vocational guidance department, a recreation and also an immigration department, mark this Cleveland office as unique among the public employment bureaus in the country, and the Cleveland idea is but a beginning in the vast plan that shall eventually make the public employment bureau the great tool at the command of the managers of employment in industry.

The Cleveland plan briefly stated is this: First, to centralize the labor market by taking over all the employment departments of separate organizations, such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the settlements and institutions. Included in this group of independent organizations was the Vocational Guidance Bureau, the forerunner of the present Girls' & Women's Bureau, which, as a private organization maintained by private funds, was consolidated with the women's department of the State-City Labor Exchange. As a result of this combination the Girls' & Women's Bureau of Cleveland began to carry on in a vital and effective way its centralized work. Financial support was secured from both the state of Ohio and the city of Cleveland. In spite of the fact that both their budgets were reduced to comply with their platform of economy, the state and city granted initial funds this year to carry on our work. The Bureau, therefore, is financed by city, state, and private funds.

After an investigation of private employment agencies was made, we found that many of these agencies were not only misrepresenting the positions they offered, but were actually sending girls to houses of ill-repute. Although the private agencies fought us through the courts, a city ordinance was adopted on February 15, 1915, regulating private employment agencies. As a result of this ordinance, thirteen of the thirty-five agencies failed to comply with the regulations and disbanded.

Our next step was to centralize community interest, to secure the coöperation of employers, labor organizations and interested individuals. In order that our Bureau obtain as broad a view of conditions as possible our advisory board, which met monthly, was composed of representatives of labor and capital and local organizations such as social settlements and the chamber of commerce, the retail merchants' board and the federation of labor. The vital problems involved in the placing of girls and women were discussed and many ideas of immediate practical value often had their birth at these meetings. For instance, at the time of the garment strike we decided that our position as a public employment bureau was not to side with either the manufacturers or the strikers, but to avoid sending girls to those factories involved without first telling them the exact conditions prevailing. Our fair attitude on this question won for us the approval of both sides.

It was always our policy to investigate employers' calls, and our survey of Cleveland industries, carefully and thoroughly made, enabled us to do intelligent placing. We secured all information concerning hours, wages, sanitary conditions, busy seasons and opportunities for advancement. We faithfully live up to our slogan: "Never send a girl to an uninvestigated place." Thus, through personal investigation, we are able to save the girl from the possibility of exploitation.

Not only do we investigate employers but also all applicants for work. Our corps of investigators includes a group of twenty-five trained workers, many of whom volunteer their services.¹ We secured the industrial and home record of all girls. We went even further, and secured the coöperation of school teachers who sent to us those children who intended to leave school. Our vocational guidance department often prevailed upon these young folks to stay in school, and in many instances, when financial stress prevented them from continuing their education, we provided scholarships through a fund established by the Federation of Women's Clubs.

Our follow-up work, finding out what becomes of those applicants we place, is continuously done for one year after they enter industry.

The result of our complete records was an understanding of each applicant, which, while unobtainable by employers, was absolutely invaluable to them. For instance, if an employment manager, for some economic reason or as a matter of preference, wished to secure girls who were living at home, there was no avenue through which he could obtain such girls other than our Bureau. Thus progressive employment managers came to realize that one way of reducing the labor turnover of girls and women was by having a personal interest in them as well as by securing in return the vital active interest of the employe in her work. To this end the employers found the Girls' & Women's Bureau an essential factor for the efficiency of their own business, and in one month 17,000 calls for girls and women were received. In time, perhaps,

¹The class in Sociology of Western Reserve University also give volunteer service to the Girls' & Women's Bureau under the supervision of the director. They do special investigating and receive credit in their college course for this work.

all employment managers will come to realize the value of using public employment bureaus. Think of the time wasted by employment managers in interviewing the applicants, many altogether unqualified, who flock in large numbers in response to newspaper advertisements or help-wanted bulletins. Consider, too, from an economic standpoint the saving it would be to employers to forego the large item of expense involved in advertising by utilizing a Bureau such as ours, conducted in a fair and intelligent manner.

Why is it necessary thus to build and create ideal public employment bureaus; why is it important in this modern day of advertising with all the many avenues for reaching and securing labor, why should the public employment bureaus be *the* central exchange where labor and capital shall meet and bargain? First of all, because the public employment bureau commands the confidence of the workingman and woman which the private bureau and, in most cases, the employment managers themselves have failed to gain. Just as a mother trustingly sends her child to public school because she has faith in the state, just as men send representatives to Congress having faith in the nation, so does labor send her children of modern industry trustingly to the public employment bureau knowing they have but to knock and they will be admitted to the house of opportunity.

Secondly, that great waste which every year in normal times constitutes over 3,000,000 able-bodied men out of work at least three months of the year, that great economic waste, can at least partially be stemmed by the joint efforts of all the public employment bureaus. At the first conference on employment held in San Francisco August 2, called by Hon. W. B. Wilson, United States Secretary of Labor, the nucleus of a plan was drawn whereby all city, state and federal bureaus, all public employment bureaus, shall be linked together in one unending chain of opportunity for the unemployed. A committee of twelve was appointed representing the city, state and federal groups which shall work on plans in detail for carrying out this great nation-wide idea; the central thought being to bring the man and the job together, not only in one state, but in every state; to bring the supply of labor

to that place where there is a demand; to transfer the oversupply of labor to those localities where it can be utilized.²

With such concentrated and widespread effort as this city-state-federal plan involves, the managers must realize that the public employment bureaus are a force and power in the labor market of the country, and, knowing this, cannot afford to ignore them in the vast employment departments in industry. Everyone is crying out in protest against the wasteful labor turnover, employers and managers are seeking some solution to this drag on the wheels of modern industry.

I firmly believe, and others who have given the matter a great deal of thought agree with me, that if the managers of employment in industry and the leaders of city-state-federal employment bureaus would get together, the cylinder through which this waste flows unstemmed would have a bottom and a top to check the shifting labor conditions. The public employment bureaus being the bottom would stop the leakage caused by the inability of the employe to find the place for which he is best fitted. The employment managers would be the top, conserving the best ability which they have thus secured, so as to keep it from flowing out only to be turned over and over.

True it is that seasonal occupations are a factor in contributing to the cause of unemployment. But if we would give the question our best thought, even this great obstacle might be partially removed. If a man picks cotton in the southern cotton fields for a short season only, why not send him, when that work is completed, to the place where he can do other work of a similar nature? And

² Committee members—Chairman, Ethelbert Stewart, chief statistician of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics; Secretary, Miss Hilda Muhlhauser, Director Girls' & Women's Bureau, State-City Labor Exchange, Cleveland; C. L. Green, U. S. Department Labor, Inspector in charge employment and distribution, U. S. Barge Office, New York City; Dr. P. L. Prentis, Inspector in charge U. S. Immigration Service, Chicago; Henry M. White, U. S. Commissioner Immigration, Seattle; Charles B. Barnes, Director Bureau of Employment, 381 Fourth Ave., New York City; Justin F. Denechaud, Secretary, State Board of Immigration, New Orleans; Luke McCoy, Secretary, Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Springfield, Ill.; Edward W. Olson, State Labor Commissioner, Olympia, Washington; H. J. Beckerle, Superintendent, public employment bureau, Milwaukee, Wis.; Harry Donoho, Superintendent, municipal free employment bureau, Los Angeles, Cal.; G. Harry Dunderdale, Superintendent, city employment bureau, Boston, Mass.

if 5,000 miners are out of work in Pennsylvania due to lack of mining there, why not send them to Ohio or West Virginia where there is a demand? The United States Secretary of Labor hopes to have a bill put through Congress making it possible for the railroads to grant reduced rates to such men and also to women, who are leaving one place to find work in another under city, state or federal guidance. This will be a great common denominator in the labor equation.

The employment managers in industry should utilize this vital force and coöperate in carrying out this plan. Of course there may be danger places, the question of unions and other organizations will arise, but only by the combined efforts of employment managers, railroad magnates, labor unions and city-state-federal employment bureaus, can any scheme for the distribution of labor be successful. Just as a small employment bureau, if it be successful, invites the coöperation of all elements concerned or effected, so must this larger plan of distribution when launched, be manned by a crew of sturdy thinkers and workers on the wild tossing sea of industrial competition and labor unrest.

The managers of employment in industry cannot possibly solve the question alone, the government cannot solve it alone, the laborer cannot solve it alone, capital cannot solve it alone, even with commerce and opportunity by its side, but the moulding together of all these elements in the great melting pot of coöperation, stirred by the master resource, shall in the end produce the well-balanced figures of labor and capital hand in hand on the heights of the world, with their child satisfaction peacefully following after them.